



NEWSLETTER

March 2025

Speaker Series: Stephanie Long and the Wingfield Museum, March 20 at 7 PM

Doña Ana County Historical Society

The second speaker of the Doña Ana County Historical Society's Speaker Series will discuss her work with Ruidoso's newly opened Wingfield Heritage House Museum, on March 20 at 7 pm in the old Good Sam's Auditorium (as well as on Zoom for members).

The museum opened its doors in October of 2024, under the direction of Stephanie Long, museum manager and curator. The museum explores the early history of Ruidoso and the Sierra Blanca region.

The museum also focuses on the Wingfields and their role in the early history of Ruidoso. Charles Wingfield came to the area in the late 1880s to establish a homestead and to manage the historic Dowlin Mill.

What is now Ruidoso was then just a stopover along the Chisolm Trail. Long said Ruidoso doesn't really come into being until the arrival of the automobile in the early 1910s and 1920s.



"Ruidoso is really an automobile town. When people started motoring up here, they began to realize that there are some real opportunities up here to establish businesses or maybe build a home," Long said.

It was in the post-WWII years that Ruidoso became a tourist destination, with area draws like Ruidoso Downs, Ski Apache, and the Inn of the Mountain Gods.



Charles Wingfield established other businesses as well, including a dairy and a general store. His family owned the house until it changed hands, and eventually it became a retail space, housing several different businesses over the years.

As such, Long said the museum is not a traditional "house museum" that recreates the original look of the house, although the Wingfield family has provided artifacts and other items for the museum's growing collection. Instead, the museum is determined to take on the duty of telling the story of the village of Ruidoso.

"We're really trying to be a history museum for Ruidoso, and to tell the story of Ruidoso, Lincoln County and the Sierra Blanca region, starting with the Mogollon up through the 1960s," Long said.

Long has spent more than 20 years working in museums around the country, including 8 years with the Las Cruces Museums System. She has a BA in history from Duke University and a Masters in History Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program of the State University of New York.

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

Joel Parra Gonzalez, April 17, The Shaping of Border Identities

Sean Schifano May 15, James B. Edson, astronomer at Lowell Observatory

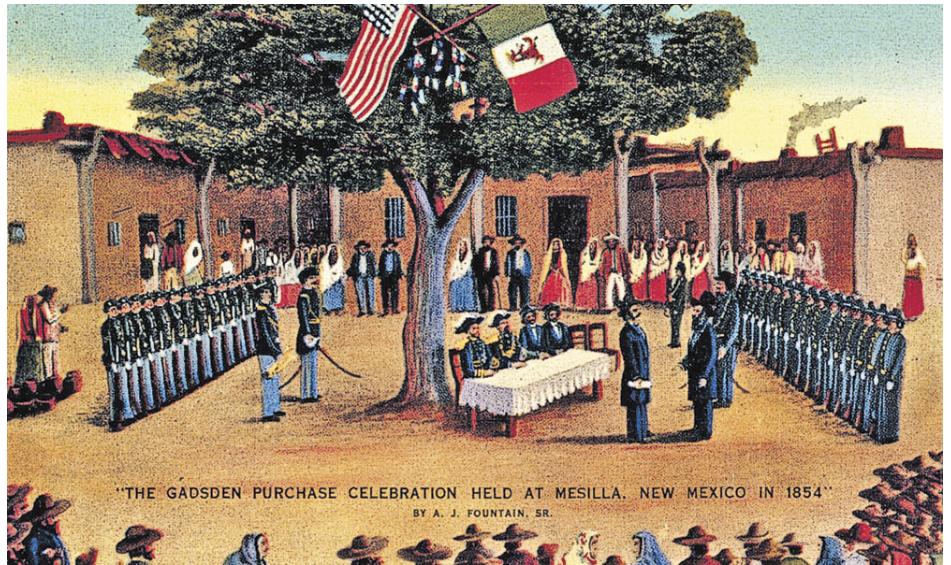
Viva Mesilla!

The Town of Mesilla Celebrates 175th anniversary



From left to right: (top left) DACHS member David Thomas offers some highlights of the early history of Mesilla. (top right) The signing of the Gadsden Purchase ceremony in Mesilla Plaza in 1854, which formally established Mesilla as an American town.

(bottom) In addition to Mesilla's birthday, fifth-generation Mesillero Buddy Ritter and wife Margaret are also celebrating 42 years of owning the Double Eagle, as well as 61 years of marriage.



Last November, Las Cruces held a big event at Klein Park, right in the heart of the historic Mesquite Street-Original Townsite district, to celebrate the 175th anniversary of its founding.

With the joyous tones of mariachi music filling the plaza, Mesilla got its turn to do the same thing this past Saturday, in a modest ceremony celebrating the town's formal founding in 1850.

It was on the first of March 175 years ago that Rafael Ruelas led 60 settlers to establish the Mesilla colony, although people had used and occupied the location for many years. But according to DACHS's own David Thomas, who gave the assembled crowd a short history of early Mesilla, it was under Ruelas that the town truly came to be.

"He was really a remarkable man," Thomas said. "This man absolutely was one of the most important persons in the founding of this town, and yet you can't find anything named after him."

A proclamation from Mesilla mayor Russell Hernandez praised Ruelas and reflected on his town's rich history.

"Over the past 175 years, the people of Mesilla have built a thriving town that honors its heritage while embracing progress and innovation," Hernandez said. "The legacy of Rafael Ruelas serves as a testament to the perseverance, vision, and pioneering spirit that continues to define Mesilla and its residents today."

Due to a dispute over the actual U.S.-Mexico border, it was initially unclear if Mesilla was part of the United States or not. The Gadsden Purchase, signed in Mesilla in 1854, cleared up that confusion, with the purchase of a strip of land in southern New Mexico-Arizona that included Mesilla.

The town remained the center of activity in southern New Mexico, serving as the county seat of government, until the arrival in 1881 of the railroad which ended up going through Las Cruces.

While Las Cruces saw many of its historic buildings come down during Urban Renewal, Mesilla escaped that fate, and the plaza today is filled with history, from the Basilica of San Albino and El Patio, to the Billy the Kid store and the Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site.

History Conference Coming to Cruces – Seeking Presenters

The 2025 Joint New Mexico-Arizona History Conference is accepting presentation proposals for its upcoming conference here in Las Cruces, September 25-27.

The conference, presented by the Historical Society of New Mexico in partnership with DACHS and the Arizona History Convention, has extended its deadline for submissions to April 4.

Presenters can explore virtually any aspect of New Mexico, Southwestern or Borderlands history and culture. Proposals related to Las Cruces or local history are encouraged. Presenters are grouped in a 2-to-3 person, 90-minute session, with each presenter speaking for approximately 20-25 minutes, and a group/audience discussion following.

See the conference’s website for more details about how to register for the convention or submit a proposal, at <https://hsnm.org/history-conference/>

Irish Culinary Demo at Fort Selden

If celebrating St. Patrick’s Day with a steaming plate of corned beef and cabbage is up your alley, join Ranger Mike around the campfire at Fort Selden Historic Site on March 15.

During its life as an active military post in the late 1800s, the frontier fort was home to troops from various ethnic backgrounds, including many first-generation immigrants from Ireland. Fort Selden’s Ranger Mike will share his family’s century-old recipe and talk about how soldiers shared their cultural diversity through food.

There will be samples and an opportunity to decorate your own Irish cookie with green and white icing (green clothing is encouraged). The big event takes place at Fort Selden, located at 1280 Fort Selden Road in Radium Springs, Saturday March 15 from 10 am to 11 am.

Regular museum admission of \$5 and free for children 16 years and younger.

Cowboy Days Are Here Again!



The New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum will celebrate its 25th year of Cowboy Days, Saturday March 8 from 9 am to 4 pm. at the museum located at 4100 Dripping Springs Road

The annual event brings history and ranching to life through a series of presentations and live demonstrations depicting historic and current practices and methods.

This year’s Cowboy Days will present several activities focused on New Mexico ranching traditions, including the “Parade of Breeds,” in which the museum’s cowboys showcase the museum’s diverse herd of cattle. The event also features trick roping and traditional Charreada demonstrations from the Castro family, as well as working dog demonstrations, live music, and a variety of vendors and food trucks.

Check the Farm and Ranch Museum website for more details.



Photo: Jerrie Cobb, one of Mercury 13 – Courtesy NASA

Space Museum To Explore Mercury 13

As part of its ongoing Launchpad Lecture series, the New Mexico Museum of Space History presents “Stars of a Different Kind: Mercury 13 and Their Quest for Space,” which explores a Cold War era research program that focused on women as potential astronauts.

Mercury 13 was a privately-funded program between 1959 and 1962 that tested the mental and physical rigors of space flight on women. Museum curator Brianna Buller said in a news release that despite their achievements in showing they had the “right stuff,” the 13 women participants never made it into the NASA program, nor ended up in space, falling victim to gender bias. She hopes her talk will highlight “the forgotten female pilots who proved women’s capability as astronauts, clearing for takeoff into Women’s History Month.”

The free lecture will take place Friday, March 7 at 9 a.m. on the 2nd floor of the main museum in Alamogordo. For more information, visit <https://nm spacemuseum.org/>

Local History Writers Needed

Calling all local historians - the Doña Ana County Historical Society's annual publication needs you.

The *Southern New Mexico Historical Review* is now accepting submissions for its 2026 issue – we are open to virtually any topic related to local, regional and borderland history, though the Review tends to focus on the history of our particular county.

Check the DACHS website for the details, but submissions must follow general historical practices, ethics and academic standards. They must be submitted digitally (so no hard copy submissions accepted) and be double-spaced, with a wide and accurate use and citation of historical sources.

Submissions ideally should be no longer than 3,000 words and must also include properly digitized images and/or photographs.

All submissions are due by September.

Published since 1994, the Review offers an impressive archive of our local history – if you have not recently, you can read or peruse all of the issues on the DACHS website, or for those who still like a physical copy, Jim Eckles recently provided the



History fans in Rodeo, NM turned out for the debut of David Thomas' play, "The Henry Fountain Murder Trial" with DACHS' Sal Patricolo as Oliver Lee.



Branigan Memorial Library with some of the editions the library was missing, completing their SNMHR collection.

You can also find at the library – and in local bookstores like COAS – the collection *Sagebrush and Sand Dunes: An Anthology of Articles from the Southern New Mexico Historical Review, 1994-2012*, compiled by Martha Shipman Andrews and Rick Hendricks.

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